

October, 2009 Newsletter

A Youthful Adventure at Every Age

As Americans, we seem to be obsessed with looking young. Billions of dollars are spent every year on magic de-wrinklers and cover-ups for what we deem imperfections in the way we look, and billions more on the snipping, clipping, and slicing we undergo to outrun the effects of gravity on our sagging jaw lines.

We have every right to use our time and money as we like, but I wonder if we are not missing something here. Are we confusing *looking* young with *being* young? George Bernard Shaw, the playwright, is credited with saying, "It's a shame that youth is wasted on the young." I think Shaw was mistaken. He mixed being young and being youthful together, not realizing that youthfulness is not limited to the early years of life.

Life's Springtime

There is a span of years that could be considered the springtime of our physical lives, when our bodies are lithe and can stand the rigors of all-night study sessions; our skins are luminous and wrinkle-free. These conditions – and they are conditions, and therefore subject to change – we tend to take for granted, sometimes even abusing ourselves with lack of care, proper food and rest, and the use of destructive chemicals. How many of us during that period, or even as we age, think to admire these wonderful bodies and bless them regularly for being such cooperative life partners? For indeed, they are partners, closer and more intimately connected to us than any other of our relationships, even the most treasured and romantic.

Our bodies are our nearest neighbors, most directly affected by our thoughts and feelings. Whenever we are angry or upset, they take the first hit of an upsurge of adrenalin and begin to work overtime. When we engage in prayer, contemplation, or meditation, the body settles into a state of homeostasis, which is beneficial for continued good health.

Deepak Chopra might say that when we are consciously using spiritual practices to energize our inner senses, we are engaging in “timeless awareness.” Chopra, much revered as a spiritual teacher and author, is also an endocrinologist, able to trace the body’s chemistry to see how subject it is to our thoughts and feelings.

The Distinction between State and Condition

Change is always taking place within that which is Changeless. The *Changeless* referring to the state of pure, ageless, limitless Being, and change being the outcome of thought and action. Our bodies, our physical lives, projects, and efforts are the real-world results of ideas that move in and out of forms. While changes in our lives happen, there is still the Changeless in which we live, move, and have our being, which receives us always, no questions asked, no judgments made. I think of this as our true youth. It may seem obvious in the body of our springtime, but it is just as dynamic and present in our fall and winter years. We can look around us and discover before our eyes youth in winter.

As I scanned a load of email recently, I found an engaging video sent by a friend. The video shows a woman dancing some vigorous salsa moves with an attentive and polished male partner. It was artful, beautiful, magnificently performed, and perfectly timed. The performance is inspiring enough, but is made more so by the fact that the female dancer is in her late eighties! Apparently, the dancing woman did not believe she was too old physically to make these wondrous moves and accordingly informed her body, which cooperated by being renewed. Here is the link to watch that amazing video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dkHvRCp3z5A>.

Chopra writes, “An aging cell is the end product of awareness that has forgotten how to remain new.” Can we imagine just how much more vital and participatory we could be in our lives if we consistently focused upon our ageless state of being rather than become bound by the condition of our bodies?

Come to Life

What is our call, then, but to come to Life and to come to It with the full integrity of mind and body, seeing it as one cohesive being? We come into life in the condition of being young, with all its flowering before us, and we can continue through life with the

state of youth available to us if we do not lock ourselves down with beliefs that hold us in place. Stability is one thing; stagnation is quite another.

Dr. W. Brugh Joy wrote of three injunctions by a woman who had received them in a powerful spiritual experience. They were: Make no comparison; make no judgments; delete you need to understand. They hold even more meaning for me today than they did when I read them thirty years ago, in pointing out a way for the youthful mind to avoid becoming ensnared in limiting, conditional thinking.

Consider this: When we make comparisons between ourselves and others, we are held in place by the comparisons. The notions of “better than” or “less than” bind us into some artificial quandary. They become conditions that hold no truth, since they cause us to be inflexibly stuck in the comparisons themselves.

When we make judgments, regarding either ourselves or others, they are usually censorious. They have a negative bite, which tends to nip the life out of healthy, flowing thinking. We can always *assess* what works for us and what does not, but to judge something or someone as good or bad tends to put ourselves and others into opposing positions of our own making.

The third injunction is the one I value most: Delete your need to understand. The need to understand can trip us up considerably. We seek to know the reasons behind what is taking place. But what if there is no understanding? What if our powerful reasons simply cannot make some things fall into place?

In insisting on knowing why, why, why, we can nail ourselves into dead-end conditions that can distract us from the more youthful adventure of who and what. In spiritual curiosity, we could instead seek to explore the great wonder of who we are. We could ask: Who am I, and what lies ahead for me to become? These questions can never fully be answered, since they are the deep questions of the soul. They always involve trying to identify more of the Changeless ourselves, even as we are changing before our own eyes. These are the question of being, of youth.

When Knowledge Becomes a Dinosaur

As time marches on, we try to improve ourselves. We get degrees in higher education; we read and handle ideas; we become fonts of information.

All of this is well and good. But if we are not careful, we can become comfortable in what we know and blinded to new insights. If this happens, we are no longer youthful at any age; we are now in danger of growing invisible plates that keep us walled up in our little castles of accumulated data. We become subject to the same problems that plagued the dinosaurs of old; we can become extinct to the power of our own lives.

Think of what it must have been like to have experienced the travails of the eighteenth-century English scientist and theologian Joseph B. Priestly! Highly acclaimed for his scientific roles in the discovery of the components of oxygen and ecosystem science, he and his family were hounded out of England for his radical religious and political views and had to make their way to a brand-new United States of America. Imagine a 61-year-old Priestly in 1794 trying to measure water temperatures off the stern of the *Samson*, seeking evidences of a “gulph stream”, all of this taking place in between terrible storms, violent seasickness, filthy conditions, black water, and wormy food! While other passengers cowered below, a transfixed Priestly rushed on deck to watch the spray and patterns of a waterspout. Here was youth personified in a man who gave up all the established comforts and possessions in his home country to set down roots among the founding fathers of a new America.

Youth-ing while Aging

But we can continue to “youth.” We can choose to keep the mind open to what the Infinite Mind is always revealing to us, and revelations always flow when we are willing to be unsettled by them. What is our stance toward life? Do we, in mind and body, thrust ourselves forth in the expectancy of God’s wonderful surprises?

As the great metaphysician Irvin Seale asked, “Are you a believer, not necessarily in some formal confession of faith, but in life and its goodness, its progression and its abundance...do you believe...that the spiritual sun is always shining the eastern heavens at an angle of 45 degrees [and] that it is always morning?” If so, then you are forever young.

